

CLAIMS

1. An active-sampling method of measuring network performance comprising:
generating one or more performance probe data packets for transmission over the
5 network, each performance probe data packet being dedicated to network performance
measurement, each probe data packet containing one or more defined timing and sequencing
parameters including send time of day, receive time of day, send sequence number and
receive sequence number;
transmitting the one or more performance probe data packets over the network to a
10 respondent address in accordance with a predefined protocol to which software residing at the
respondent address is programmed to respond in a predefined way; and
analyzing a response from the software resident at the respondent address in
accordance with the predefined protocol with respect to the one or more defined timing and
sequencing parameters to measure the performance of the network.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said generating, transmitting and analyzing
steps are performed by dedicated performance assurance software residing at a given network
node and wherein the software residing at the respondent address modifies one or more of the
defined timing and sequencing parameters within each received performance probe data
20 packet in accordance with the predefined protocol and then echoes the received-and-modified
performance probe data packet back to the dedicated performance assurance software.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the modifying of each received performance
probe data packet in accordance with the predefined protocol and the echoing of the received-
25 and-modified performance probe data packet are performed by dedicated performance
assurance software residing at the respondent address.

4. A method of monitoring performance of an Internet protocol (IP) network, the method comprising:

generating a timing probe data packet to be sent over the network, the timing probe data packet containing at least a send time of day (TOD) stamp for a sender of the timing probe data packet;

sending the timing probe data packet over the network from the sender to a receiver; and

analyzing the timing probe data packet contents including at least the send TOD stamp as a performance measure of the network.

5. The method of claim 4 which further comprises, between said sending and said analyzing,

writing into the timing probe data packet at the receiver data including at least a receive TOD stamp, and

echoing the timing probe data packet by the receiver thereof, wherein the sender of the timing probe data packet performs said analyzing based upon the send TOD stamp and the receive TOD stamp.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein said generating is performed in such manner that the timing probe data packet further contains a send sequence stamp, wherein said writing further includes a receive sequence stamp, and wherein said analyzing is based further upon the send sequence stamp and the receive sequence stamp.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said analyzing step includes first calculating the difference between the send TOD stamp and the receive TOD stamp as a latency performance measure of the network.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein said generating, sending and analyzing are repeated for at least two successive ones of such timing probe data packets, and wherein said analyzing step further includes first calculating the difference between the send TOD stamp and the receive TOD stamp for a first one of the successive ones of such timing probe data packets, second calculating the difference between the send TOD stamp and the receive TOD stamp for a second one of the successive ones of such timing probe data packets, and third calculating the difference between the first and second calculated differences as an inter-packet jitter performance measure of the network.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said analyzing includes comparing the send sequence stamp and the receive sequence stamp as a packet loss performance measure of the network.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein said writing includes writing into the timing probe data packet at the receiver data further including a delta time stamp representing the amount of time the data packet resided at the receiver and wherein said first and said second calculating includes subtracting the contents of the delta time stamp from the calculated differences.

11. Apparatus for measuring data packet transmission timing characteristics through an Internet protocol (IP) network, the apparatus comprising:

a sender software program residing on a computer-readable medium at a network node, the sender software program generating a probe data packet to be sent over the network, the probe data packet containing at least a send time of day (STOD) stamp, the sender software program further transmitting the probe data packet to a respondent address in the network, and

a responder software program residing on a computer-readable medium at a network node, the responder software program receiving the probe data packet, placing therein at least a receive time of day (RTOD) stamp, and echoing the probe data packet by transmitting the modified packet back to said sender software program,

the sender software program further determining a difference between the RTOD and the STOD, whereby the determined difference represents data packet transmission timing through the network.

12. The apparatus of claim 11 wherein the responder software program resides at the respondent network address.

13. The apparatus of claim 11 wherein said responder software program resides at the same network address as does the sender software.

14. The apparatus of claim 11 wherein the probe data packet when generated by said sender software program further contains a send sequence number for a present probe data packet representing the sequence in which plural ones of such probe data packets are sent, and wherein said responder software program further places in the received probe data packet a receive sequence number representing the last received probe data packet in sequence and wherein said sender software program then further compares the send sequence number and the receive sequence number to determine whether the probe data packets were received by said responder in the order the probe data packets were sent by said sender and if not then records the result of such comparison as a data loss.

15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein plural ones of such probe data packets are generated and transmitted to the respondent network address, wherein the responder software program calculates a variance among plural instances of such first differences as a measure of inter-packet jitter.

16. A method for measuring data packet jitter in an Internet protocol (IP) network, the method comprising:

at a sender network address generating to a first data packet Pa probe field including a send-time sub-field, a receive-time sub-field and a delta-time sub-field;

at the sender network address first placing in the send-time sub-field the send time of day (STOD) indication;

from the sender network address sending the data packet including the probe field;

receiving the data packet including the probe field at a respondent network address;

second placing in the receive-time sub-field the receive time of day (RTOD) at the respondent network address;

echoing the data packet including the probe field back to the sender network address;

saving the echoed data packet in a memory at the sender network address;

repeating the generating, first placing, sending, receiving, second placing and echoing steps for a second data packet Pb; and

calculating data packet jitter based upon the STOD and the RTOD sub-fields for first and second data packets Pa and Pb.

17. A method for measuring data packet loss in an Internet protocol (IP) network, the method comprising:

at a sender network address generating a first data packet Pa probe field including a send-sequence-number sub-field;

at the sender network address first placing in the send-sequence-number sub-field a send sequence number representing the relative send timing of the first data packet Pa;

from the sender network address sending the data packet including the first data packet Pa probe field;

receiving the data packet including the first data packet Pa probe field at a respondent network address;

second placing in the receive-sequence-number sub-field a receive sequence number at the respondent network address, the receive sequence number representing the relative receive timing of the first data packet Pa;

echoing the data packet including the probe field back to the sender network address;

saving the echoed data packet in a memory at the sender network address; and

comparing the send-sequence-number sub-field with the receive-sequence-number sub-field at the sender network address to measure data packet loss.

18. For use in active-sampling measurement of network performance, an article of manufacture comprising a computer-readable medium containing a program, the program comprising:

instructions for generating one or more performance probe data packets for transmission over the network, each performance probe data packet being dedicated to network performance measurement, each probe data packet containing one or more defined timing and sequencing parameters including send time of day, receive time of day, send sequence number and receive sequence number;

instructions for transmitting the one or more performance probe data packets over the network to a respondent address in accordance with a predefined protocol to which software residing at the respondent address is programmed to respond in a predefined way; and

instructions for analyzing a response from the software resident at the respondent address in accordance with the predefined protocol with respect to the one or more defined timing and sequencing parameters to measure the performance of the network.

19. The program of claim 18, wherein said instructions for generating, transmitting and analyzing form a part of dedicated performance assurance software residing at a given network node and wherein the software residing at the respondent address modifies one or more of the defined timing and sequencing parameters within each received performance probe data packet in accordance with the predefined protocol and then echoes the received-and-modified performance probe data packet back to the dedicated performance assurance software.

20. The program of claim 19, wherein the modifying of each received performance probe data packet in accordance with the predefined protocol and the echoing of the received-and-modified performance probe data packet are performed by dedicated performance assurance software residing at the respondent address.

21. An article of manufacture comprising a computer-readable medium containing a program, the program comprising:

instructions for generating a timing probe data packet to be sent over the network, the timing probe data packet containing at least a send time of day (TOD) stamp for a sender of the timing probe data packet;

instructions for sending the timing probe data packet over the network from the sender to the receiver; and

instructions for analyzing the timing probe data packet contents including at the send TOD stamp as a performance measure of the network.

22. The program of claim 21 which further comprises, for execution between said instructions for sending and said instructions for analyzing,

instructions for writing into the timing probe data packet at the receiver data including at least a receive TOD stamp, and

instructions for echoing the timing probe data packet by the receiver thereof, wherein the sender of the timing probe data packet performs said analyzing based upon the send TOD stamp and the receive TOD stamp.

23. The program of claim 22 wherein said instructions for generating are executed in such manner that the timing probe data packet further contains a send sequence stamp, wherein said instructions for writing are executed in such manner that the data written into the timing probe data packet at the receiver further includes a receive sequence stamp, and wherein said instructions for analyzing are executed in such manner that the analyzing is based further upon the send sequence stamp and the receive sequence stamp.

24. Service assurance agent apparatus for measuring data packet transmission timing characteristics through an Internet protocol (IP) network, the apparatus comprising: a sender generating a probe data packet to be sent over the network, the probe data packet containing at least a send time of day (STOD) stamp, said sender further transmitting the probe data packet to a respondent address in the network, and

a responder at a respondent address in the network, said responder receiving the probe data packet, placing therein at least a receive time of day (RTOD) stamp to produce a modified probe data packet, and echoing the modified probe data packet by transmitting the modified probe data packet back to said sender,

said sender further determining a difference between the RTOD stamp and the STOD stamp, whereby the determined difference represents data packet transmission through the network.

25. The apparatus of claim 24 wherein the probe data packet when generated by said sender further contains a send sequence number for the present probe data packet representing the sequence in which plural ones of such probe data packets are sent, and where said responder further places in the received probe data packet a receive sequence number representing the last received probe data packet in sequence to produce the modified probe data packet and wherein said sender further compares the send sequence number and the receive sequence number to determine whether the probe data packets were received by said responder in sequence and if not then records the result of such comparison as a data loss.

26. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein plural ones of such probe data packets are generated and transmitted to the respondent network address and received, modified and echoed by said responder, wherein said sender calculates plural instances of such differences and wherein said sender further calculates a variance among such plural instances of such differences as a measure of inter-packet jitter.

27. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said sender includes one or more comparators for performing such comparison.

28. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said sender includes at least one subtractor for determining such difference and at least one comparator for performing such comparison.

29. The apparatus of claim 24 wherein said sender includes one or more subtractors for determining such difference.

30. A method of measuring network performance comprising:
5 receiving at a given network address one or more performance probe data packets transmitted from a sender node address in the network, each performance probe data packet being dedicated to network performance measurement and each performance probe data packet having a defined receive time of day (RTOD) field therein;
in accordance with a predefined protocol modifying each performance probe data
10 packet by placing in the defined RTOD field thereof the receive time of day of the corresponding performance probe data packet to produce one or more modified performance probe data packets; and
echoing each modified performance probe data packet back to the sender node address in the network.

31. The method of claim 30 in which each performance probe data packet further has a defined delta time field therein, wherein said modifying is performed by further placing in the defined delta time field data substantially representative of an amount of time elapsed while performing said modifying and said echoing of the corresponding performance probe
20 data packet.

32. The method of claim 30 in which each performance probe data packet further has a defined receive sequence stamp field therein, wherein said modifying is performed by further placing in the defined receive sequence stamp field a receive sequence stamp
25 representing the order in which each performance probe data packet is received at the given network